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(54) **STRUCTURE, METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR
COMPLEMENTARY STRAIN FILL FOR
INTEGRATED CIRCUIT CHIPS**

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G06F 12/0866; G06F 17/5081; G06F 1/1626;
G06F 2212/0222; G06F 17/5072; G06F
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(71) Applicant: **GLOBALFOUNDRIES INC.**, Grand
Cayman (KY)

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See application file for complete search history.

(72) Inventors: **Brent A. Anderson**, Jericho, VT (US);
Edward J. Nowak, Essex Junction, VT
(US); **Jed H. Rankin**, Richmond, VT
(US)

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(73) Assignee: **GLOBALFOUNDRIES Inc.**, Grand
Cayman (KY)

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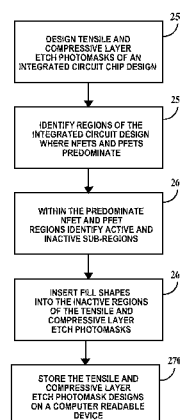
Primary Examiner — Binh Tat

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Thompson Hine LLP;
Anthony Canale

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A structure, method and system for complementary strain fill
for integrated circuit chips. The structure includes a first
region of an integrated circuit having multiplicity of n-chan-
nel and p-channel field effect transistors (FETs); a first
stressed layer over n-channel field effect transistors (NFETs)
of the first region, the first stressed layer of a first stress type;
a second stressed layer over p-channel field effect transistors
(PFETs) of the first region, the second stressed layer of a
second stress type, the second stress type opposite from the
first stress type; and a second region of the integrated circuit,
the second region not containing FETs, the second region
containing first sub-regions of the first stressed layer and
second sub-regions of the second stressed layer.

20 Claims, 11 Drawing Sheets



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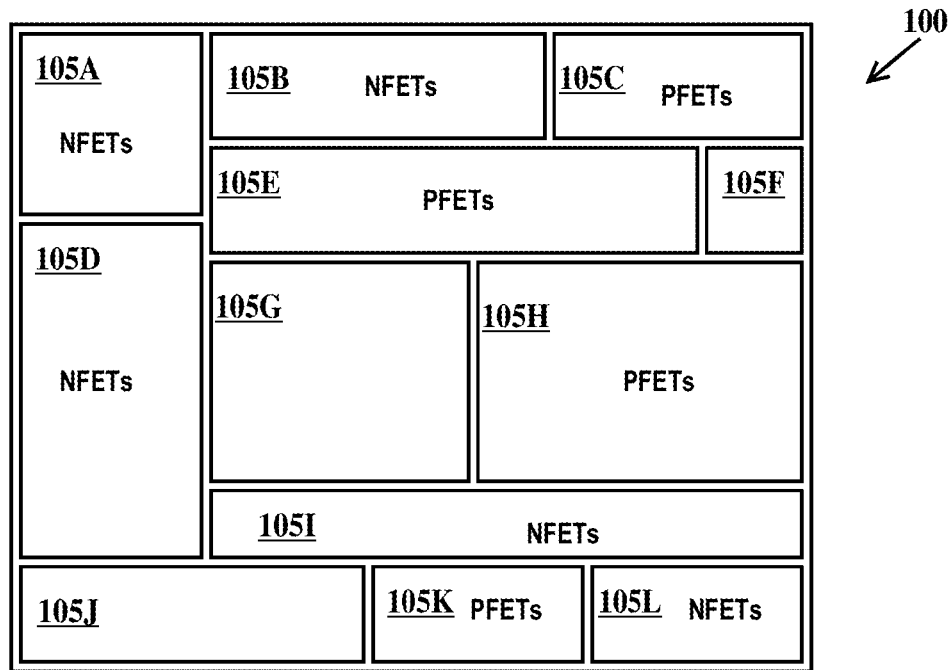
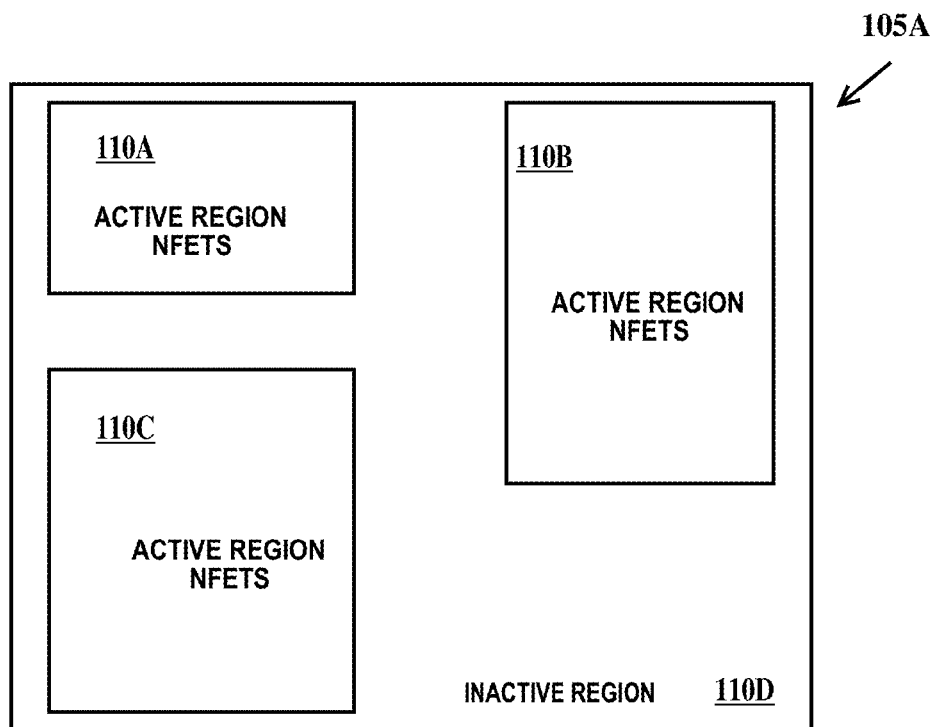
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*FIG. 1**FIG. 2*

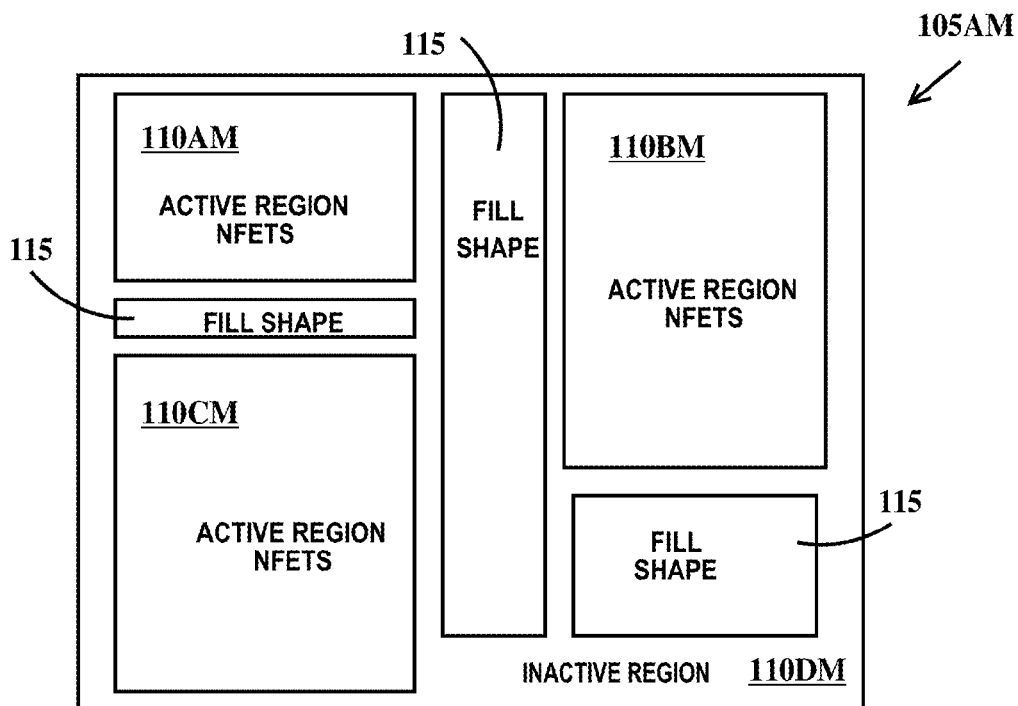


FIG. 3

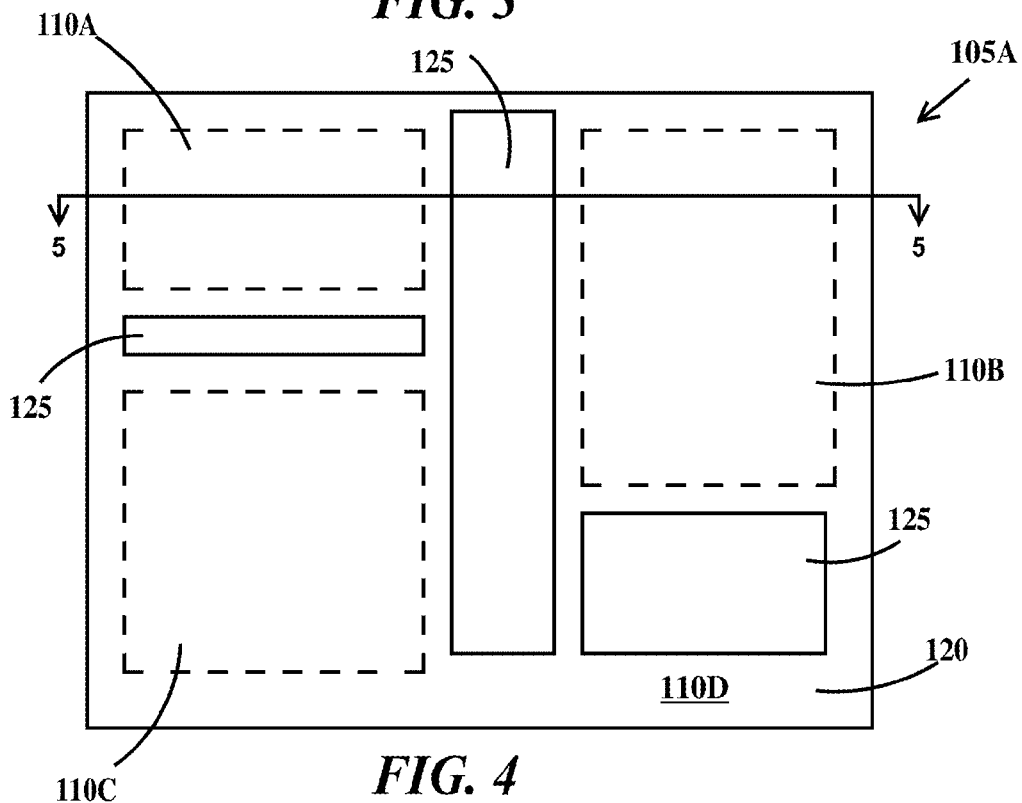


FIG. 4

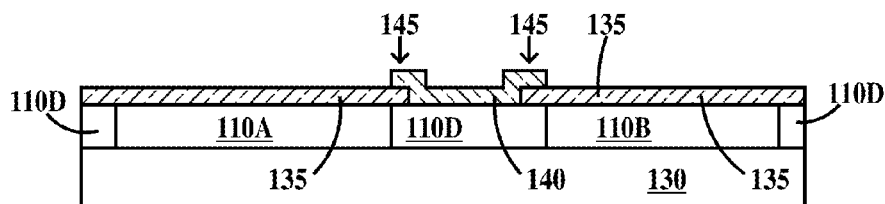


FIG. 5

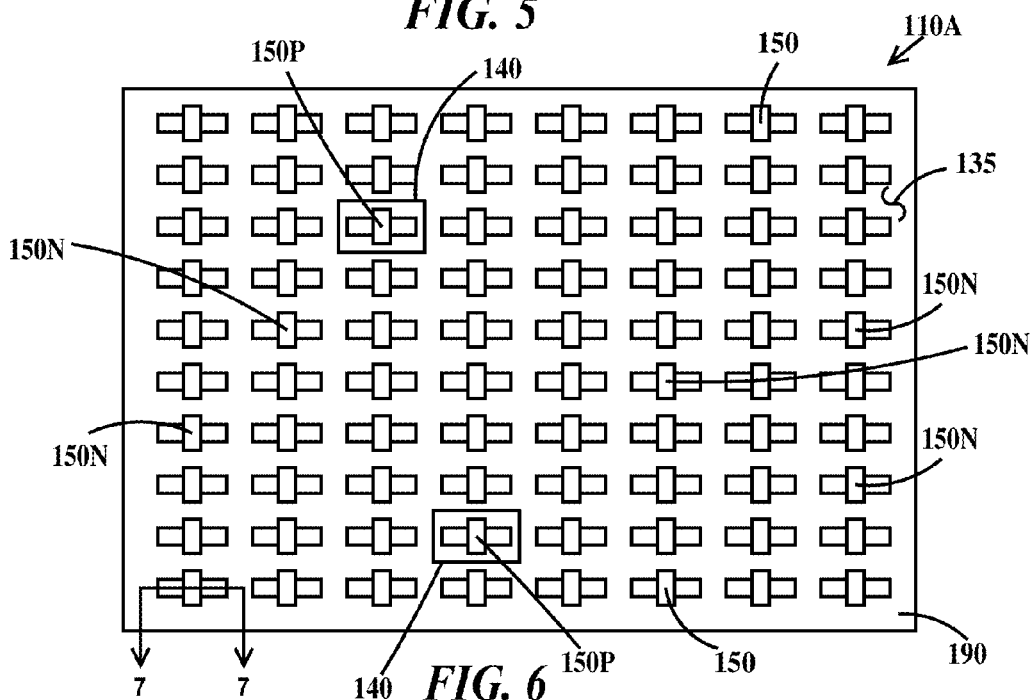


FIG. 6

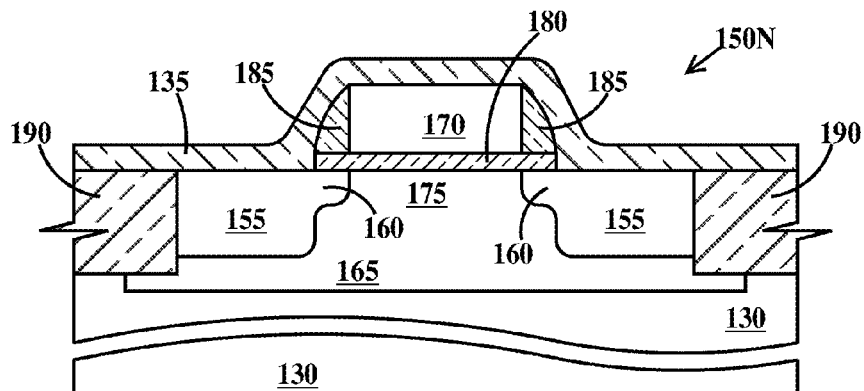


FIG. 7

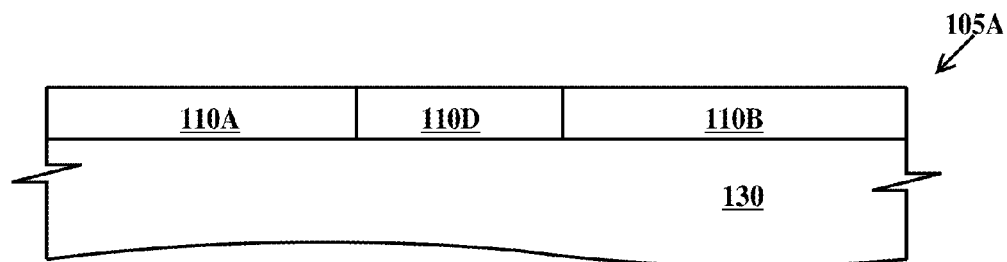


FIG. 8A

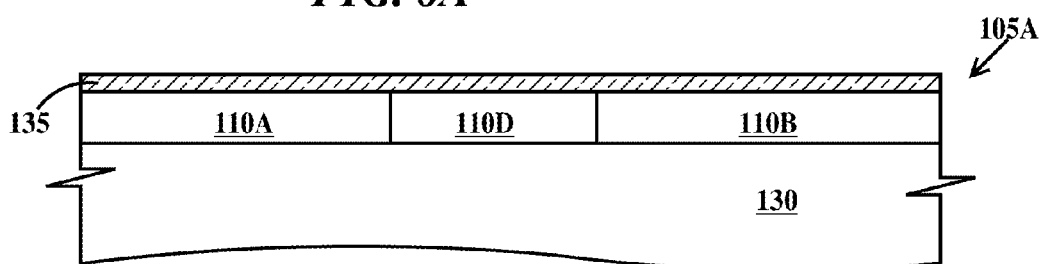


FIG. 8B

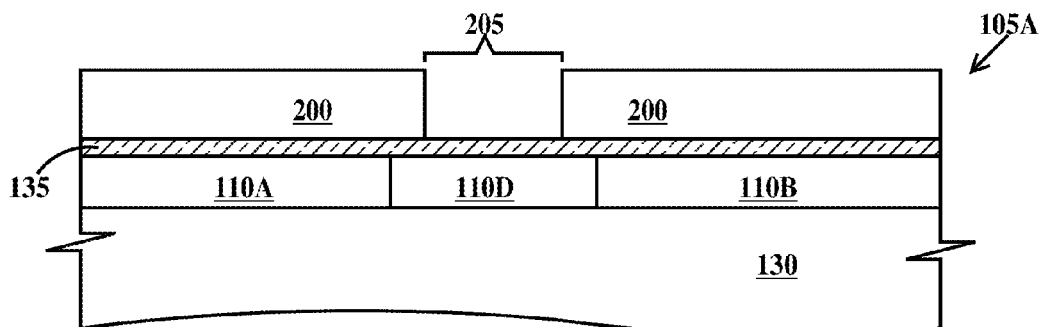


FIG. 8C

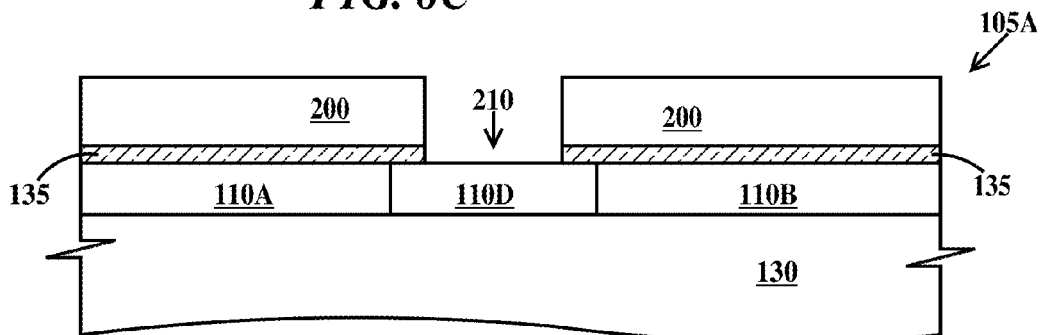


FIG. 8D

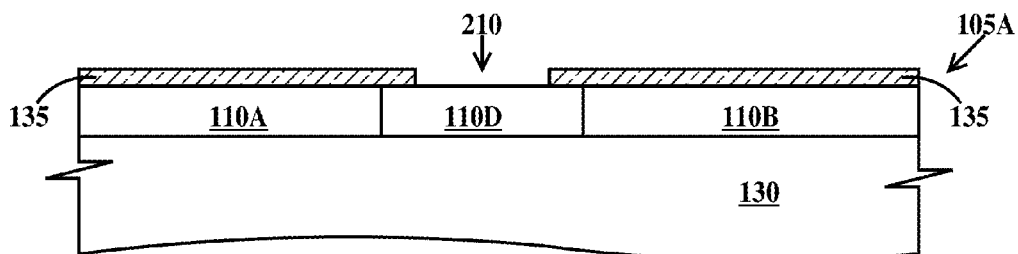


FIG. 8E

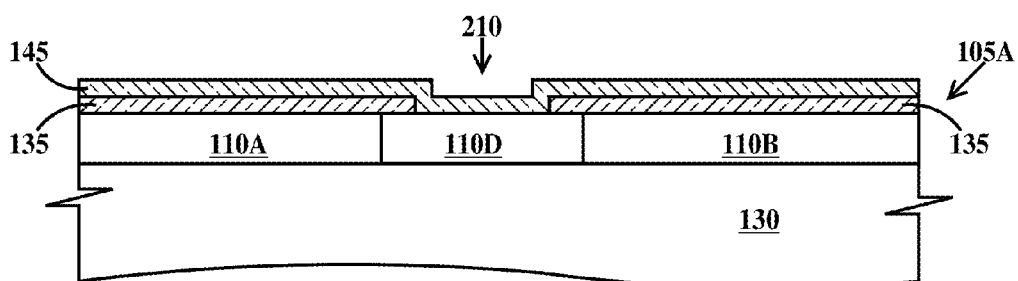


FIG. 8F

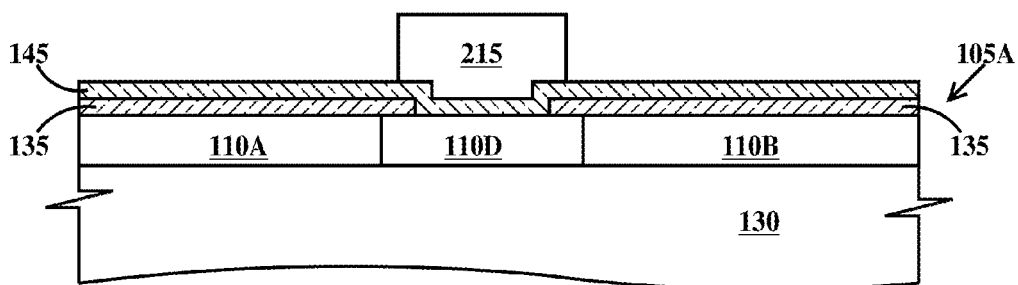


FIG. 8G

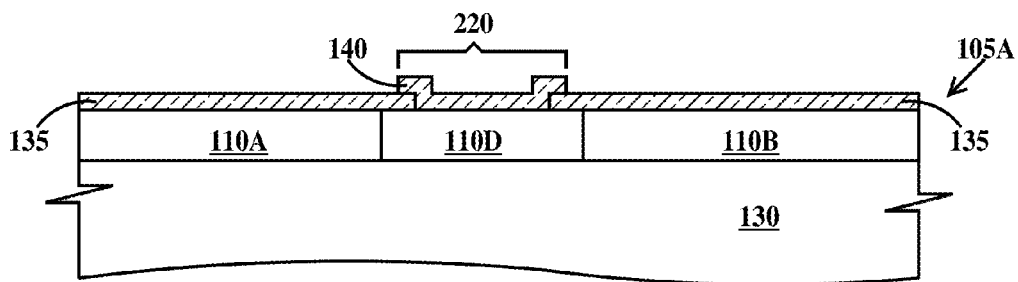
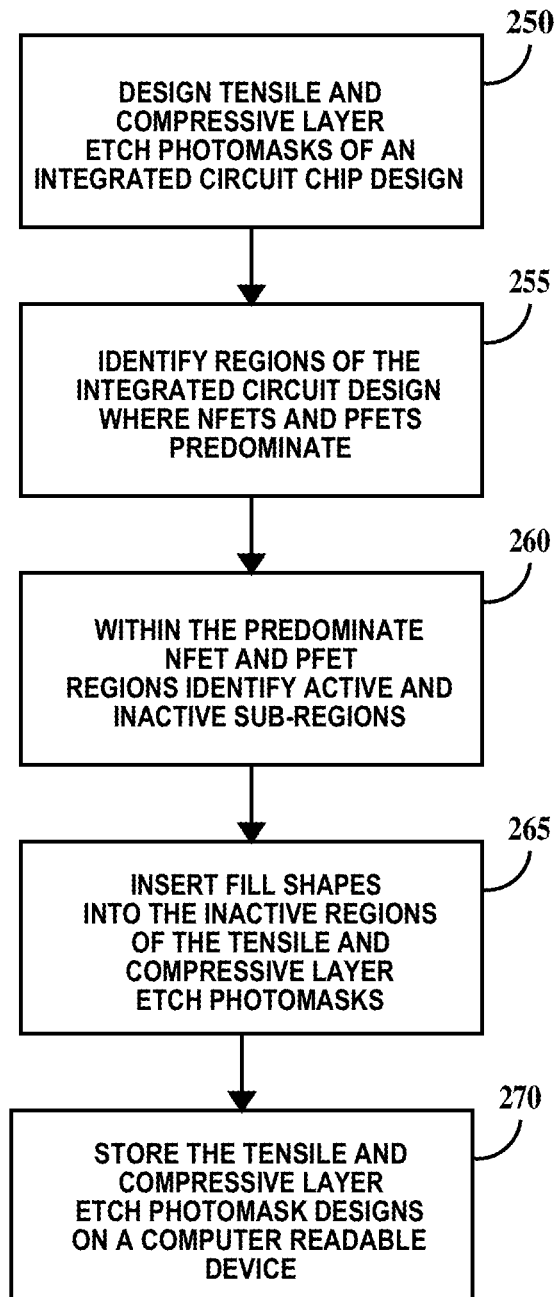


FIG. 8H

**FIG. 9**

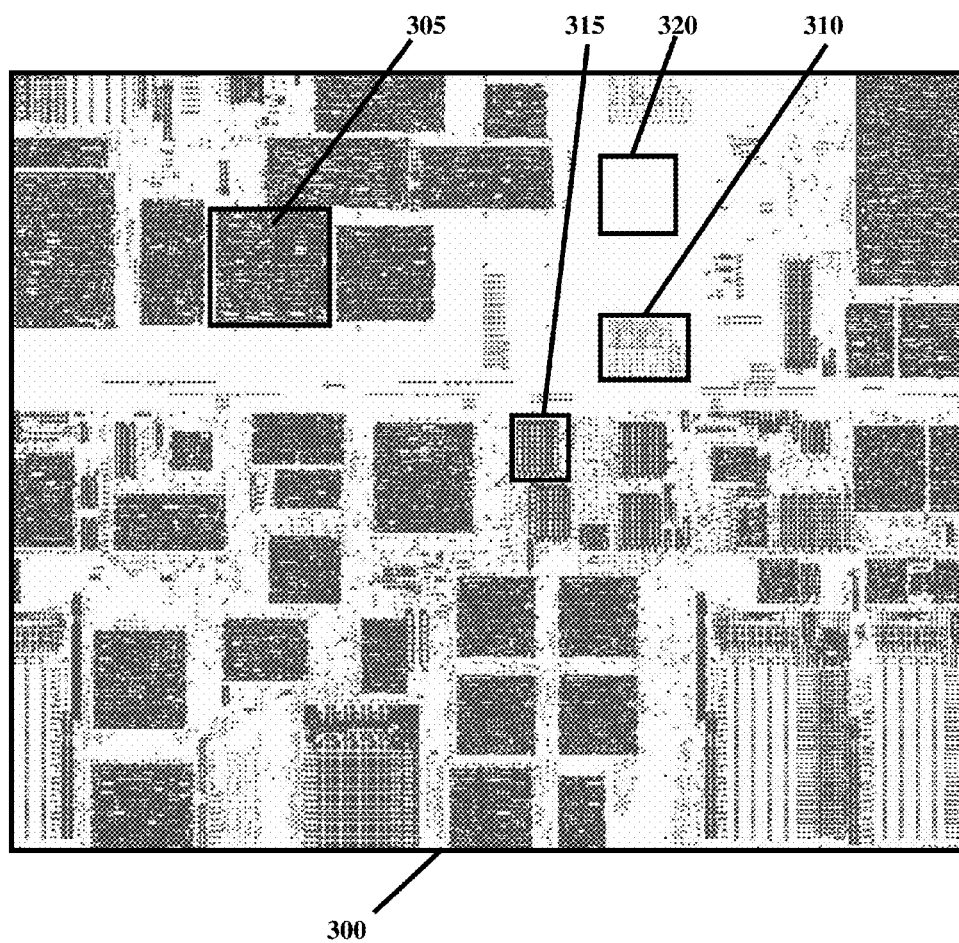


FIG. 10

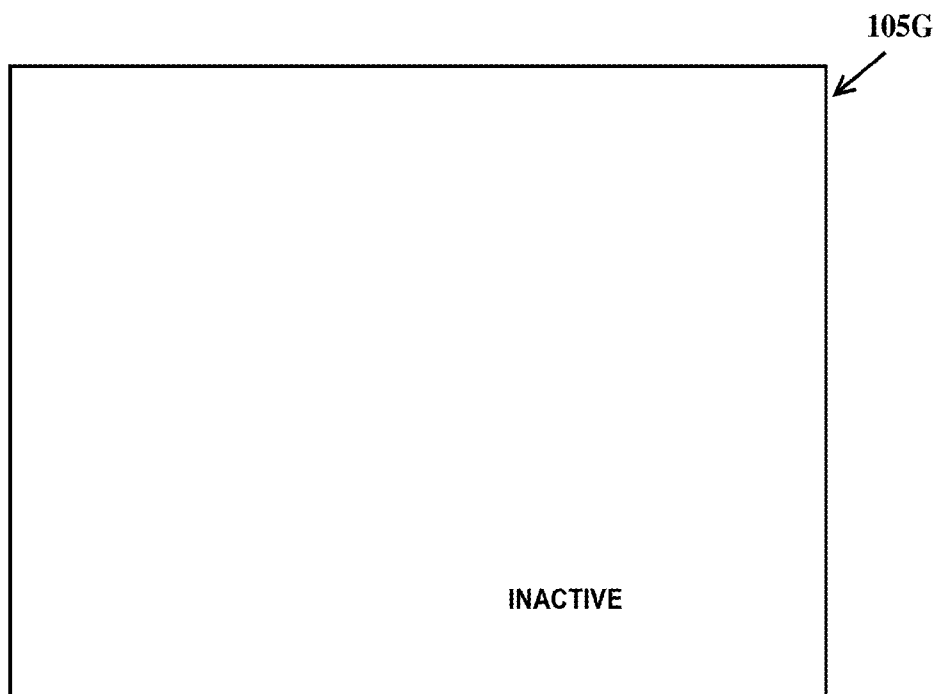


FIG. 11

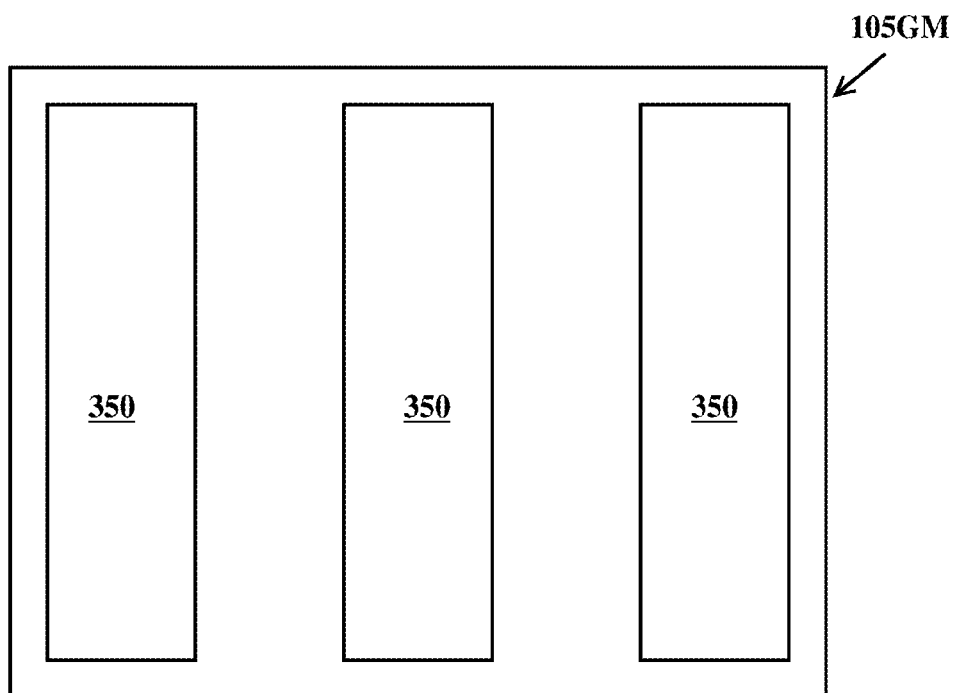


FIG. 12

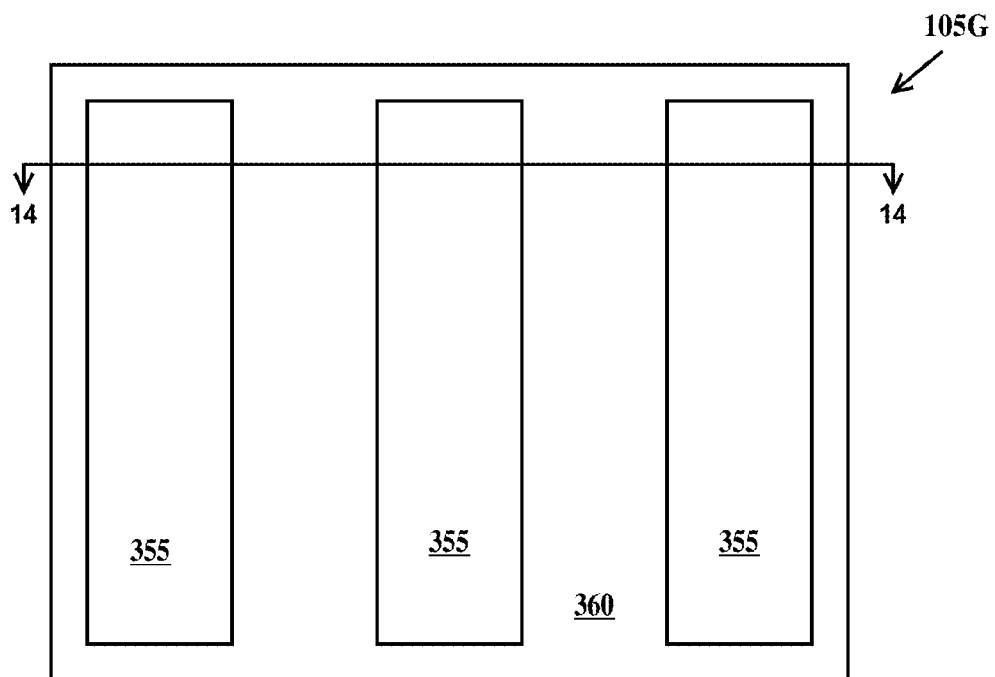


FIG. 13

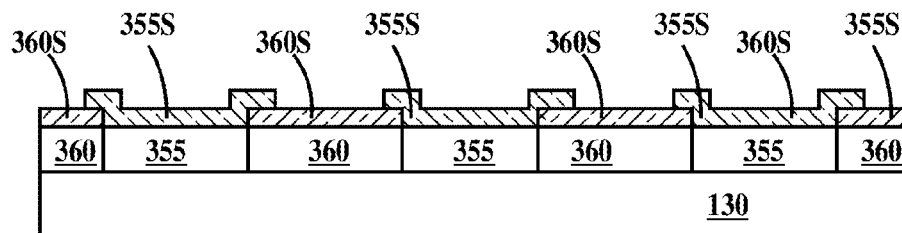
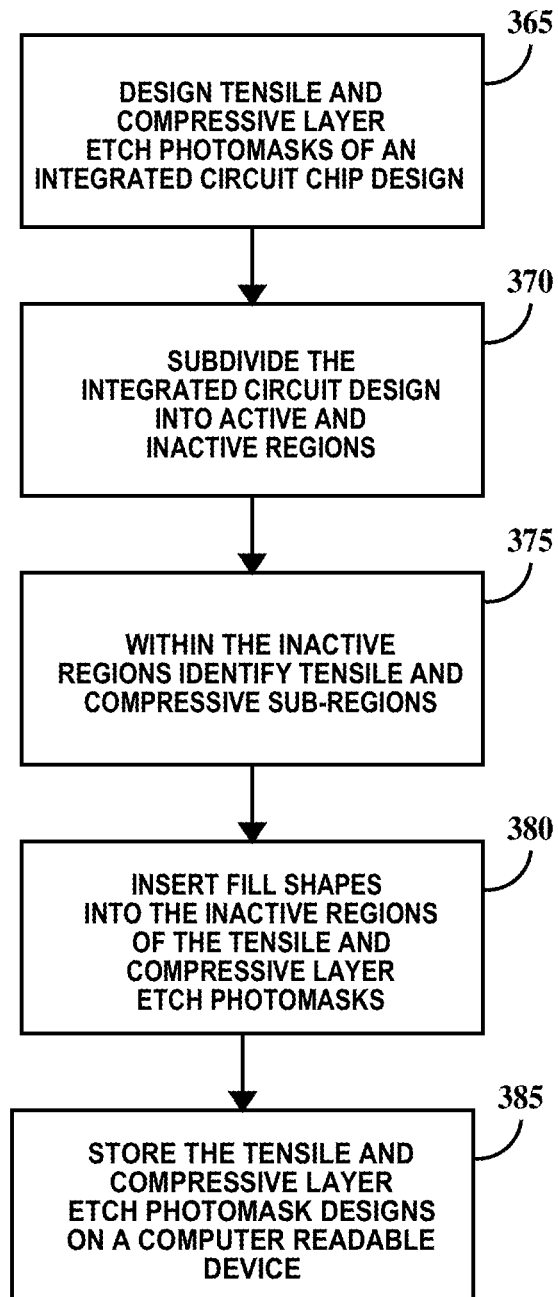


FIG. 14

**FIG. 15**

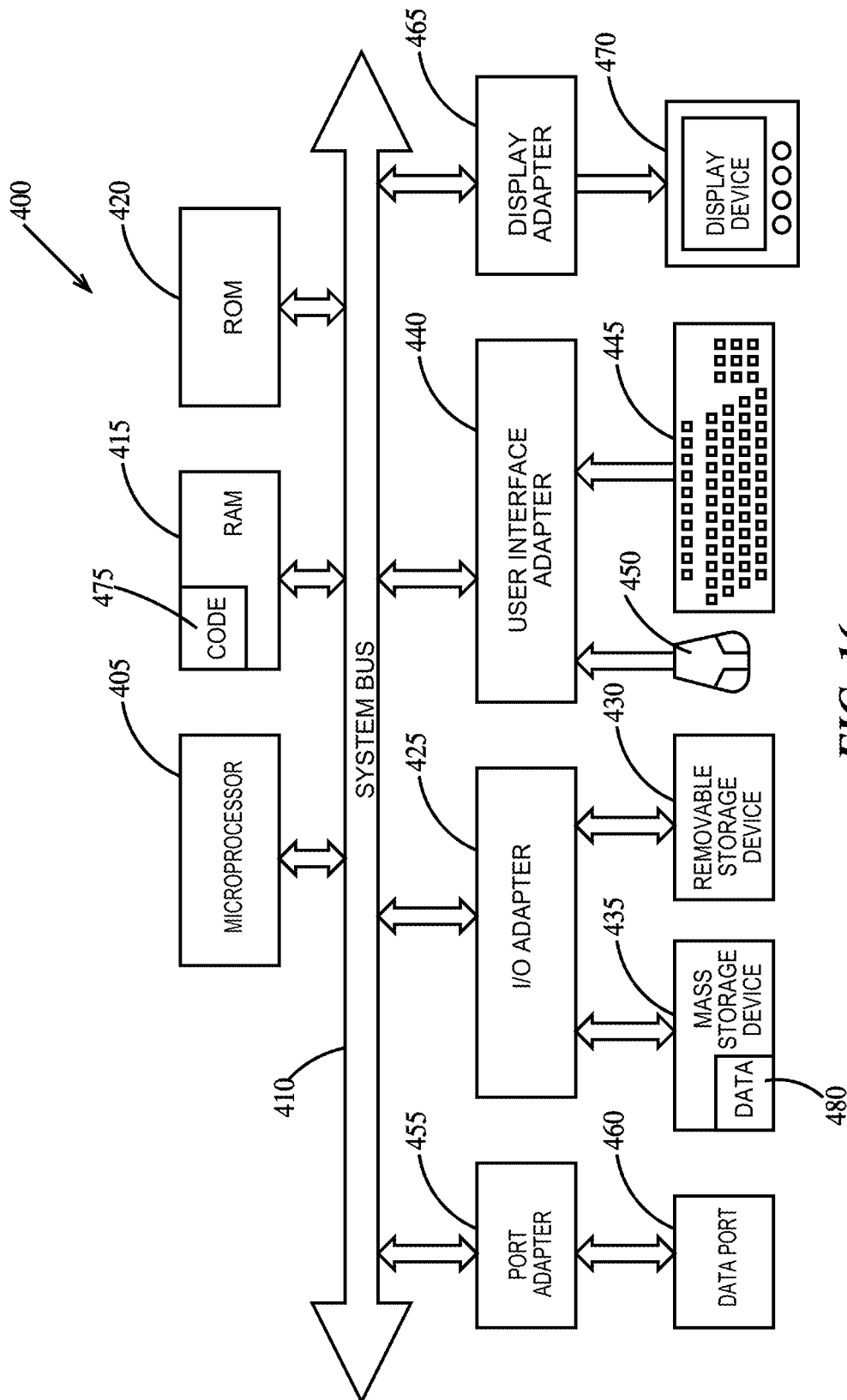


FIG. 16

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STRUCTURE, METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR COMPLEMENTARY STRAIN FILL FOR INTEGRATED CIRCUIT CHIPS

RELATED APPLICATIONS

The present Application is a division of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/774,069 filed on Feb. 22, 2013 which is a division of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/983,353 filed on Jan. 3, 2011 now U.S. Pat. No. 8,470,674 issued Jun. 25, 2013.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to the field of integrated circuits; more specifically, it relates to structure, method and system for complementary strain fill for integrated circuit chips.

BACKGROUND

In modern integrated circuit chips, different regions of the chip may have different amounts of strain induced into different regions of the substrate in which devices such as field effect transistors are fabricated. As the dimensions of the devices have decreased so has the misalignment tolerance between the mask images of different masking levels used to fabricate the various devices and interconnect structures of the integrated circuit chip. The strain induced into the substrate can often be non-uniform enough across an integrated circuit chip to cause local image placement errors between some of the existing structures on previously fabricated levels and some of the mask images on the mask being used to define structures of a current fabrication level. Image placement errors can lead to yield loss during fabrication and poor reliability of the completed integrated circuits chips. Accordingly, there exists a need in the art to mitigate or eliminate the deficiencies and limitations described hereinabove.

SUMMARY

A first aspect of the present invention is a structure, comprising: a first region of an integrated circuit having a multiplicity of n-channel and p-channel field effect transistors (FETs); a first stressed layer over n-channel field effect transistors (NFETs) of the first region, the first stressed layer of a first stress type; a second stressed layer over p-channel field effect transistors (PFETs) of the first region, the second stressed layer of a second stress type, the second stress type opposite from the first stress type; and a second region of the integrated circuit, the second region not containing FETs, the second region containing first sub-regions of the first stressed layer and second sub-regions of the second stressed layer.

A second aspect of the present invention is a method, comprising: forming a first region of an integrated circuit having a multiplicity of n-channel and p-channel field effect transistors (FETs); forming a first stressed layer over n-channel field effect transistors (NFETs) of the first region, the first stressed layer of a first stress type; forming a second stressed layer over p-channel field effect transistors (PFETs) of the first region, the second stressed layer of a second stress type, the second stress type opposite from the first stress type; and forming a second region of the integrated circuit, the second region not containing FETs, the second

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region containing first sub-regions of the first stressed layer and second sub-regions of the second stressed layer.

A third aspect of the present invention is a computer system comprising a processor, an address/data bus coupled to the processor, and computer-readable memory device coupled to communicate with the processor, the memory device containing instructions that when executed by the processor implement a method for complementary strain fill for integrated circuit chips, the method comprising the computer implemented steps of, comprising: designing an integrated circuit chip; designing tensile and compressive layer etch photomasks; identifying active regions of an integrated circuit having a multiplicity of n-channel and p-channel field effect of transistors (FETs); identifying inactive regions of the integrated circuit not containing FETs; placing fill shapes in the tensile and compressive layer etch mask designs, the fill shapes placed only in regions of the tensile and compressive layer etch photomask designs corresponding to the inactive sub-regions; and storing the tensile and compressive etch mask designs on a computer readable device.

These and other aspects of the invention are described below.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The features of the invention are set forth in the appended claims. The invention itself, however, will be best understood by reference to the following detailed description of an illustrative embodiment when read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

FIG. 1 is top view of an integrated circuit chip according to embodiments of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is an enlarged view of a sub-region of the integrated circuit chip of FIG. 1 before stressed layers are applied;

FIG. 3 is an enlarged view of a region of a photomask having fill shapes corresponding to the region of the integrated circuit chip illustrated in FIG. 3 according to embodiments of the present invention;

FIG. 4 is an enlarged view of the region of the integrated circuit chip illustrated in FIG. 2 after processing according to embodiments of the present invention;

FIG. 5 is a cross-sectional view through line 5-5 of FIG. 4;

FIG. 6 is a plan view of a sub-region of the integrated circuit chip illustrated in FIG. 5;

FIG. 7 is cross-section through line 7-7 of FIG. 6 illustrating a typical field effect transistor;

FIGS. 8A through 8H are cross-sectional views illustrating steps in the fabrication of an integrated circuit chip according to embodiments of the present invention;

FIG. 9 is a flowchart of a method for designing photomasks according to embodiments of the present invention;

FIG. 10 is plan view of an actual integrated circuit chip illustrating how different regions are populated with field effect transistors;

FIG. 11 is an enlarged view of another sub-region of the integrated circuit chip of FIG. 1 before stressed layers are applied;

FIG. 12 is an enlarged view of a region of a photomask having fill shapes corresponding to the region of the integrated circuit chip illustrated in FIG. 11 according to embodiments of the present invention;

FIG. 13 is an enlarged view of the region of the integrated circuit chip illustrated in FIG. 11 after processing according to embodiments of the present invention;

FIG. 14 is a cross-sectional view through line 14-14 of FIG. 13;

FIG. 15 is a flowchart of a method for designing photomasks according to embodiments of the present invention; and

FIG. 16 is a schematic block diagram of a general-purpose computer.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The present invention embeds layers of opposite stress over inactive regions of an integrated circuit chip into stressed layers formed over an integrated circuit chip in order to make the strain in different regions of the integrated circuit chip more uniform. This reduces localized errors in photomask (e.g., reticles) alignment as described infra. In one example, inactive regions are regions where less than 10% of the area of the region contains active circuit devices (field effect transistors are examples of active circuit devices). In one example, inactive regions are regions that contain no active circuit devices. In one example, active regions are regions where greater than 70% of the area of the region contains active circuit devices.

Stress is a measure of the average amount of force exerted per unit area. Stress is a measure of the intensity of the total internal forces acting within a body across imaginary internal surfaces, as a reaction to external applied forces and body forces. Strain is the geometrical expression of deformation caused by the action of stress on a physical body. Young's modulus (E) is a measure of stiffness. It is defined as the ratio, for small strains, of the rate of change of stress with strain. In N-channel field effect transistors (NFETs), the mobility of the majority carriers, electrons, is greater (hole mobility is less) when the channel is in tensile stress in the direction of current flow. In P-channel field effect transistors (PFETs) the mobility of the majority carriers, holes, is greater (electron mobility is less) when the channel region is in compressive stress in the direction of current flow. Increasing the mobility of majority carriers increases the performance of the device. Therefore, tensile stressed layers are formed on NFETs and compressive stressed layers are formed on PFETs. Since the density of NFETs and PFETs varies locally across an integrated circuit chip, the stress hence the strain also varies locally. Strain can offset physical structures from their designed locations. This causes placement errors as images on subsequent photomasks no longer align to the previously defined structures.

A photolithographic process is one in which a photoresist layer is applied to a surface of a substrate (e.g., integrated circuit chip), the photoresist layer exposed to actinic radiation through a patterned photomask (opaque images in a clear field or clear images in an opaque field) that has been aligned to target marks on the substrate and the exposed photoresist layer developed to form a patterned photoresist layer. Alignment involves aligning registration images on the photomask to the target marks on the substrate. After processing (e.g., etching or ion implantation), the patterned photoresist is removed. Some images on the photomask may not register to corresponding images on the integrated circuit chip because those images have been offset from designed locations by non-uniform strain as described supra even though the registration images align perfectly to the target marks.

An example is contact level, which defines the locations of contacts to the source/drains, gates of FETs. If the source/drains or gates are not where they are expected to be based on the design grid because strain has displaced them,

the contact openings in local regions will be etched in offset locations relative to the source/drains causing some contacts to contact structures they should not contact.

FIG. 1 is top view of an integrated circuit chip according to embodiments of the present invention. In FIG. 1, an integrated circuit chip 100 is divided into regions 105A, 105B, 105C, 105D, 105E, 105F, 105G, 105H, 105I, 105J, 105K and 105L. A region where NFETs predominate is defined as a region where greater than a preset target percentage of all FETs are NFETs. A region where PFETs predominate is defined as a region where greater than the preset target percentage of all FETs are PFETs. A region where neither NFETs nor PFETs are the predominate type of FET is defined as a region where the percentage of neither NFETs nor PFETs exceed the preset target percentage of all FETs. In one example, the preset target percentage is about 70%. In the example of FIG. 1, in regions 105A, 105B, 105D, 105I, and 105L NFETs predominate (designated by the label "NFETs"). In regions 105C, 105E, 105H and 105K PFETs predominate (designated by the label "PFETs"). In regions 105F, 105G and 105J neither NFETs nor PFETs predominate. A given region can be (i) active or inactive and (ii) NFET predominate or PFET predominate or neither NFET nor PFET predominant. Thus there are six possible combinations. To simplify the descriptions of the embodiments of the present invention, regions 105A, 105B, 105D, 105I and 105L are active and predominate NFET regions, regions 105C, 105E, 105H and 105K are active and predominate PFET regions and regions 105F, 105G and 105J are inactive regions.

Because NFETs predominate in regions 105A, 105B, 105D, 105I, and 105L, the average amount of strain is due to the larger areas of tensile stress layer compared to compressive stress layer in sub-regions 105A, 105B, 105D, 105I, and 105L. Because PFETs predominate in sub-region 105B, 105E, 105H, and 105K the average amount of strain is due to the larger areas of compressive stress layer compared top tensile stress layer in sub-regions 105B, 105E, 105H and 105K. The average strain in sub-regions 105F, 105G and 105J will often be lower compared to regions 105A, 105B, 105C, 105D, 105E, 105H, 105I, 105K and 105L because neither areas of compressive nor tensile stress layers predominate to the same extent as in regions 105A, 105B, 105C, 105D, 105E, 105H, 105I, 105K and 105L. Further, the absolute value of stress in tensile stressed layers may be different than that in compressive stressed layers. The point is strain is not uniform from region to region or even within sub-regions of regions 105A, 105B, 105C, 105D, 105E, 105F, 105G, 105H, 105I, 105J, 105K and 105L as discussed infra.

The average strain in a region may be roughly determined by

$$S_{AV} \propto [S_T \times A_T + (S_C \times A_C)] / 2 \quad (1)$$

where

S_{AV} is the average strain in a region;

S_T is the amount of stress in the tensile layer;

A_T is the area of the tensile stress layer;

S_C is the amount of stress in the compressive layer; and

A_C is the area of the compressive stress layer.

It will be appreciated in the description that follows, a predominately NFET region will be used as an example, but that the invention applies equally to predominately PFET regions, by substituting PFET for NFET, NFET for PFET, tensile for compressive and compressive for tensile.

FIG. 2 is an enlarged view of region 105A of the integrated circuit chip of FIG. 1 before stressed layers are

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applied. Region **105A** includes sub-regions **110A**, **110B**, **110C** and **110D**. Sub-regions **110A**, **110B** and **110C** are active regions that include predominately NFETs (there may be PFETs present as well) and are labeled "ACTIVE". Sub-region **110D** is an inactive region that contains neither NFETs nor PFETs or contains a very small numbers of NFETs and/or PFETs, e.g., less than about 10% of the area of the region contains NFETs and/or PFETs which may be widely scattered and is labeled "INACTIVE".

FIG. **3** is an enlarged view of region of a photomask having fill shapes corresponding to the region of the integrated circuit chip illustrated in FIG. **2** according to embodiments of the present invention. In FIG. **3**, a photomask region **105AM** corresponding to region **105A** includes sub-regions **110AM**, **110BM**, **110CM** and **110DM** corresponding to sub-regions **110A**, **110B**, **110C**, **110D** of FIG. **2**. Region **105M** includes fill shapes **115** within inactive sub-region **110DM**. Fill shapes **115** define areas where tensile nitride will be removed and compressive nitride formed. There is also a complimentary photomask similar to the photomask of FIG. **3** but of opposite polarity having fill shapes that define the extent of the compressive nitride over sub-region **110D** of FIG. **2**. See, for example, FIGS. **8A** through **8H** and description infra.

FIG. **4** is an enlarged view of the region of the integrated circuit chip illustrated in FIG. **2** after processing according to embodiments of the present invention. In FIG. **4**, a tensile stressed layer **120** and a compressive stressed layer **125** are formed over region **105A**. Layer **120** extends over regions **110A**, **110B** and **110C** and overlaps region **110D** along the perimeters of regions **110A**, **110B** and **110C**. Layer **120** may include regions of compressive stressed layers (e.g., over PFETs) in sub-regions **110A**, **110B** and **110C** (see FIG. **6**). Layer **125** extends over portions of sub-region **110D** corresponding to fill shapes **115** of FIG. **3**. Because of the average stress of regions **125** is the opposite of the average stress of regions **120**, the average strain in region **105A** is lower than would otherwise be without region **125** and the strain in region **105A** is more uniform thus reducing image placement errors.

FIG. **5** is a cross-sectional view through line 5-5 of FIG. **4**. In FIG. **5**, a substrate **130** includes sub-regions **110A** and **110B**. A dielectric tensile stressed layer **135** has been formed over sub-regions **110A** and **110B** and overlapping region **110D**. A dielectric compressive stressed layer **140** has been formed over sub-region **110D**. Layers **135** and **140** overlap in regions **145**. There may be regions of layer **140** over sub-regions **110A** and **110B** (not shown because of the scale of FIG. **5**) but as illustrated in FIG. **6**. In one example substrate **130** is a single-crystal silicon substrate. In one example substrate **130** is a silicon-on-insulator (SOI) substrate comprising a single crystal silicon layer separated from a supporting substrate by a buried oxide (BOX) layer and regions **105A** through **105L** of integrated circuit chip **100** (see FIG. **1**) are formed in the silicon layer.

FIG. **6** is a plan view of a sub-region of the integrated circuit chip illustrated in FIG. **5**. In FIG. **6**, sub-region **110A** includes NFETs **150N** covered only by tensile layer **135** and optional PFETs **150P** covered only by compressive layer **140**.

FIG. **7** is cross-section through line 7-7 of FIG. **6** illustrating a typical field effect transistor. In FIG. **7** a typical NFET **150N** includes N-type source/drains **155** having N-type source/drain extensions **160** in a P-well **165** of substrate **160** and a gate electrode **170** over a channel region **175** in P-well **165** between source/drain extensions **155**. Gate electrode **170** is separated from source/drains **155**,

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source/drain extensions **160** and channel region **175** by a gate dielectric **180**. Optional dielectric sidewall spacers **185** are formed on opposite sides of gate electrode **170**. Tensile layer **135** is formed over NFET **150N**. NFET **150N** is isolated by trench isolation **190** formed in substrate **130**. For a PFET, the source/drains and source/drain extensions would be P-type and formed in an N-well.

FIGS. **8A** through **8H** are cross-sectional views illustrating steps in the fabrication of an integrated circuit chip according to embodiments of the present invention. In FIG. **8A**, sub-regions **110A**, **110B** and **110D** have been formed in region **105A** substrate **130**. Sub-regions **110A** and **110B** include, for example, PFETs, NFETs and trench isolation, but are dominated by NFETs.

In FIG. **8B**, tensile stressed layer **135** is formed on sub-regions **110A**, **110B** and **110D**. In one example, tensile stressed layer **135** is silicon nitride (Si_3N_4). In one example, a tensile stressed Si_3N_4 layer is formed by low-pressure chemical vapor deposition (LPCVD) using silane (SiH_4) and ammonia (NH_3) precursor gases. In one example, tensile stressed layer **135** is between about 50 nm and about 100 nm thick. In one example, the amount of tensile stress is between about 0.5 GPa and about 4 GPa.

In FIG. **8C**, a patterned photoresist layer **200** is formed on tensile stressed layer **135** having an opening **205** over sub-region **110D**. Opening **205** was defined by fill shape **115** of FIG. **3**.

In FIG. **8D**, tensile stressed layer **135** is removed (e.g., by wet or reactive ion etch (RIE)) to form a trench **210** completely through stressed layer **135** over sub-region **110D**.

In FIG. **8E**, patterned photoresist layer **200** (see FIG. **8D**) is removed.

In FIG. **8F**, compressive stressed layer **140** is formed on tensile stressed layer **135** and on sub-region **110D** in trench **210**. In one example, compressive stressed layer **140** is Si_3N_4 . In one example, a compressive stressed Si_3N_4 layer is formed by high density plasma (HDP) deposition or plasma enhanced chemical vapor deposition (PECVD) using SiH_4 , NH_3 and nitrogen (N_2) precursor gases. In one example, a compressive stressed layer **140** is between about 60 nm and about 120 nm thick. In one example, the amount of compressive stress is between about 0.5 GPa and about 4 GPa.

In FIG. **8G**, a patterned photoresist layer **215** is formed on compressive stressed layer **140** having over sub-region **110D**. Patterned photoresist layer **215** was defined by a complimentary (opposite polarity) photomask having a similar photomask fill shape to that of photomask fill shape **115** of FIG. **3**.

In FIG. **8H**, compressive stressed layer **140** is removed (e.g., by wet or RIE) where not protected by patterned photoresist layer **215** (see FIG. **8G**) to form an island **220** of compressive stressed layer **140** on sub-region **110D**. Patterned photoresist layer **215** (see FIG. **8G**) is also removed.

It will be apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art that the order of deposition and patterning of tensile layer **135** and compressive layer **140** may be reversed, however deposition and patterning of tensile stressed films is preferred.

FIG. **9** is a flowchart of a method for designing photomasks according to embodiments of the present invention. In step **250**, the complimentary photomasks of an integrated circuit design that define the extents of the tensile and compressive layers are designed.

In step **255**, regions of the integrated circuit design where NFETs (and thus tensile stress) predominate and where PFETs (and thus compressive stress) predominate are iden-

tified. The photomask data from step 250 may be used or other design data that defines locations of NFETs and PFETs may be used.

In step 260, the regions of step 255 are grouped into active sub-regions (sub-regions that contain FETs) and inactive sub-regions (sub-regions that do not contain FETs) as illustrated in FIG. 2.

In step 265, fill shapes are inserted into the inactive regions of the compressive and tensile layer etch mask designs as illustrated in FIG. 3. Fill shapes are placed in inactive regions of the tensile layer etch photomask design when NFETs predominate and in inactive regions of the compressive layer etch photomask design when PFETs predominate. Fill shapes are placed in inactive regions of the compressive layer etch photomask design when PFETs predominate and in inactive regions of the tensile layer etch photomask design when NFETs predominate. Fill shapes define areas of stress layers to be removed.

In step 270, the tensile and compressive photomask etch mask designs are stored on a computer readable storage medium or device as mask fabrication datasets (e.g., netlists and/or shapes files). Netlist and shapes files impart a logical and physical structure to the storage medium as specific data for fabricating specific structures are located in specific locations on the medium. Actual tensile and compressive layer etch photomasks may be fabricated using the mask fabrication datasets.

FIG. 10 is plan view of an actual integrated circuit chip 300 illustrating how different regions are populated with field effect transistors. In FIG. 10, dark areas are NFETs and clear regions are PFETs. An exemplary region 305 is dominated by NFETs. An exemplary region 310 is dominated by PFETs. An exemplary region 315 is not dominated by NFETs or PFETs. An exemplary region 320 contains neither NFETs or PFETs or contains a very small number of NFETs and/or PFETs, e.g., less than about 10% of the area of the region contains NFETs or PFETs) which may be widely scattered. For regions having no NFETs or PFETs or very small numbers of NFETs and PFETs, a slightly different method is required as is now explained.

FIG. 11 is an enlarged view of region 105G of the integrated circuit chip of FIG. 1 before stressed layers are applied. Region 105G contains neither NFETs or PFETs or contains a very small number of NFETs and/or PFETs, e.g., less than about 10% of the area of the region contains NFETs or PFETs) which may be widely scattered. In the initial integrated circuit design, region 105G may be entirely compressive stressed or entirely tensile stressed. However, if there are NFETs in region 105G, there may be a tensile stress layer over the NFETs and a compressive stress layer over the rest of region 105G so compressive stress is the predominate stress layer in the region. Likewise, if there are PFETs in region 105G, there may be a compressive stress layer over the PFETs and a tensile stress layer over the rest of region 105G so tensile stress is the predominate stress layer in the region. Compressive and tensile stress layers may comprise silicon nitride.

FIG. 12 is an enlarged view of region of a photomask having fill shapes corresponding to the region of the integrated circuit chip illustrated in FIG. 11 according to embodiments of the present invention. In FIG. 12, a photomask region 105GM corresponding to region 105G having fill shapes 350 is shown. When region 105G is initially designed with a tensile stress layer (or a tensile stress layer predominates), fill shapes 350 define areas where the tensile layer will be removed and a compressive layer formed. There is also a complimentary photomask similar to the

photomask of FIG. 12 but of opposite polarity having fill shapes that define the extent of the compressive layer over region 105G of FIG. 11.

When region 105G is initially designed compressive stress layer (or a compressive stress layer predominates), fill shapes 350 define areas where the compressive layer will be removed and a tensile layer formed. There is also a complimentary photomask similar to the photomask of FIG. 12 but of opposite polarity having fill shapes that define the extent of the tensile layer over sub-region 105G of FIG. 11.

FIG. 13 is an enlarged view of the region of the integrated circuit chip illustrated in FIG. 11 after processing according to embodiments of the present invention. In FIG. 13, oppositely stressed sub-regions 355 and sub-region 360 have been formed in region 105G. Because of the average stress of sub-region 355 is the opposite of the average stress of sub-region 360, the average strain in region 105G is lower than would otherwise be without sub-regions 355 and the strain in region 105G is more uniform thus reducing image placement errors.

FIG. 14 is a cross-sectional view through line 14-14 of FIG. 13. In FIG. 14, a dielectric first type stressed layer 355S has been formed over sub-regions 355 and overlapping sub-region 360. A dielectric second and opposite type stressed layer 360S has been formed over sub-region 360. Layers 355S and 360S overlap.

FIG. 15 is a flowchart of a method for designing photomasks according to embodiments of the present invention. In step 365, the complimentary photomasks of an integrated circuit design that define the extent of the tensile and compressive layers are designed.

In step 370, the integrated circuit design is divided into active and inactive regions. The photomask data from step 365 may be used or other design data that defines areas of no FETs or having low density FETs may be used.

In step 375, the regions of step 370 are grouped into tensile sub-regions and compressive sub-regions.

In step 380, fill shapes are inserted into the inactive regions of the compressive and tensile layer etch mask designs as illustrated in FIG. 12. Fill shapes define areas of stress layers to be removed.

In step 385, the tensile and compressive photomask etch mask designs are stored on a computer readable storage medium or device as mask fabrication datasets (e.g., netlists and/or shapes files). Actual tensile and compressive layer etch photomasks may be fabricated using the mask fabrication datasets.

It should be understood that the method described relative to FIGS. 9 and 15 may be practiced together on the same integrated circuit chip design or just one of the methods may be practiced.

Thus the embodiments of the present invention provide a structure having more uniform strain and method for fabricating structures with more uniform strain so as to reduce or eliminate strain induced image placement errors.

Generally, the method described herein with respect to designing photomasks for complementary strain fill for integrated circuit chips is practiced with a general-purpose computer and the methods described supra in the flow diagrams of FIG. 9 and FIG. 15 may be coded as a set of instructions on removable or hard media for use by the general-purpose computer.

FIG. 16 is a schematic block diagram of a general-purpose computer. In FIG. 16, computer system 400 has at least one microprocessor or central processing unit (CPU) 405. CPU 405 is interconnected via a system bus 410 to a random access memory (RAM) 415, a read-only memory (ROM)

420, an input/output (I/O) adapter 425 for connecting a removable data and/or program storage device 430 and a mass data and/or program storage device 435, a user interface adapter 440 for connecting a keyboard 445 and a mouse 450, a port adapter 455 for connecting a data port 460 and a display adapter 465 for connecting a display device 470.

ROM 420 contains the basic operating system for computer system 400. The operating system may alternatively reside in RAM 415 or elsewhere as is known in the art. Examples of removable data and/or program storage device 430 include magnetic media such as floppy drives and tape drives and optical media such as CD ROM drives. Examples of mass data and/or program storage device 435 include electronic, magnetic, optical, electromagnetic, infrared, and semiconductor devices. Examples of a computer-readable medium include a semiconductor or solid state memory, magnetic tape, a removable computer diskette, a random access memory (RAM), a read-only memory (ROM), a rigid magnetic disk and an optical disk. Current examples of optical disks include compact disk-read only memory (CD-ROM), compact disk-read/write (CD-R/W) and DVD. In addition to keyboard 445 and mouse 450, other user input devices such as trackballs, writing tablets, pressure pads, microphones, light pens and position-sensing screen displays may be connected to user interface 440. Examples of display devices include cathode-ray tubes (CRT) and liquid crystal displays (LCD).

A computer program with an appropriate application interface may be created by one of skill in the art and stored on the system or a data and/or program storage device to simplify the practicing of this invention. In operation, information for the computer program created to run the present invention is loaded on the appropriate removable data and/or program storage device 430, fed through data port 460 or typed in using keyboard 445.

Thus, the embodiments of the present invention provide a method for designing photomasks for complementary strain fill for integrated circuit chips.

The description of the embodiments of the present invention is given above for the understanding of the present invention. It will be understood that the invention is not limited to the particular embodiments described herein, but is capable of various modifications, rearrangements and substitutions as will now become apparent to those skilled in the art without departing from the scope of the invention. Therefore, it is intended that the following claims cover all such modifications and changes as fall within the true spirit and scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A computer system comprising:

a processor; and

a computer-readable memory device coupled to communicate with said processor, said memory device containing instructions that, when executed by the processor, implement a method for complementary strain fill for integrated circuit chips by:

generating an integrated circuit chip design for an integrated circuit chip;

generating a tensile layer etch mask design for an etch mask used to etch a tensile stressed dielectric layer as specified in said integrated circuit chip design;

generating a second mask design for an etch mask used to etch a compressive stressed dielectric layer as specified in said integrated circuit chip design;

identifying active regions of an integrated circuit having a plurality of n-channel field effect transistors (NFETs) and a plurality of p-channel field effect transistors (PFETs);

identifying inactive regions of said integrated circuit design not containing NFETs or PFETs;

placing fill shapes in said layer etch mask design and in said compressive layer etch mask design, said fill shapes placed only in respective regions of said tensile layer etch mask design and said compressive layer etch mask design corresponding to said inactive regions, and said fill shapes defining areas of said tensile stressed dielectric layer to be removed from said integrated circuit chip fabricated based on said tensile layer etch mask design and areas of said compressive stressed dielectric layer to be removed from said integrated circuit chip fabricated based on said compressive layer etch mask design; and

storing said tensile and compressive etch mask designs on a computer readable device.

2. The computer system of claim 1, further comprising: identifying sub-regions of said active regions, said sub-regions not containing FETs; and

placing additional fill shapes in said tensile and compressive layer etch mask designs, said additional fill shapes placed only in regions of said tensile and compressive layer etch mask designs corresponding to said sub-regions such that when PFETs are the predominate type of FET in said active regions a tensile layer will result on said integrated circuit chip fabricated from said tensile and compressive layer etch mask designs and when NFETs are the predominate FETs of said sub-regions a tensile layer will result on said integrated circuit chip fabricated from said tensile and compressive layer etch mask designs.

3. The computer system of claim 1, further comprising: placing first additional fill shapes in said tensile layer etch mask design, said additional fill shapes placed only in regions of said tensile layer etch mask design where NFETs predominate; and

placing second additional fill shapes in said compressive layer etch mask design, said additional fill shapes placed only in regions of said compressive layer etch mask design where PFETs predominate.

4. The computer system of claim 1, wherein greater than 70% of the area of each active region of said integrated circuit design contains NFETs, PFETs, or both.

5. The computer system of claim 1, wherein said fill shapes are placed in said tensile layer etch mask design corresponding to said inactive regions only when greater than 70% of the area of said corresponding active regions of said integrated circuit design contains NFETs.

6. The computer system of claim 1, wherein said fill shapes are placed in said compressive layer etch mask design corresponding to said inactive regions only when greater than 70% of the area of said corresponding active regions of said integrated circuit design contains PFETs.

7. The computer system of claim 1, wherein said tensile layer etch mask design and said compressive layer etch mask design are stored in a netlist.

8. The computer system of claim 1, wherein said tensile layer etch mask design and said compressive layer etch mask design are stored in a shapes file.

9. The computer system of claim 1, wherein said computer readable storage device is selected from the group consisting of magnetic tape, a removable computer diskette,

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a random access memory device, a read only memory device, a rigid magnetic disk and an optical disk.

10. The computer system of claim 1, wherein said fill shapes comprise material from the compressive stressed dielectric layer added to the areas of said tensile stressed dielectric layer that are removed from said integrated circuit chip fabricated using said tensile layer etch mask design and material from the tensile stressed dielectric layer added to the areas of said compressive stressed dielectric layer to be removed from said integrated circuit chip fabricated using said compressive layer etch mask design.

11. A computer system comprising:

a processor; and

a computer-readable memory device coupled to communicate with said processor, said memory device containing instructions that, when executed by the processor, implement a method for complementary strain fill for integrated circuit chips by:

generating an integrated circuit chip design for an integrated circuit chip;

generating a tensile layer etch mask design for an etch mask used to etch a tensile stressed dielectric layer as specified in said integrated circuit chip design;

generating a second mask design for an etch mask used to etch a compressive stressed dielectric layer as specified in said integrated circuit chip design;

identifying active regions of an integrated circuit having a plurality of field effect transistors (FETs) distributed among a plurality of n-channel field effect transistors (nFETs) and a plurality of p-channel field effect transistors (pFETs);

identifying low field effect transistor (FET) density regions of said integrated circuit design, said low FET density regions containing less than 10% FETs by area;

placing fill shapes in said layer etch mask design and in said compressive layer etch mask design, said fill shapes placed only in respective regions of said tensile layer etch mask design and said compressive layer etch mask design corresponding to said low FET density regions, and said fill shapes defining areas of said tensile stressed dielectric layer to be removed from said integrated circuit chip fabricated based on said tensile layer etch mask design and areas of said compressive stressed dielectric layer to be removed from said integrated circuit chip fabricated based on said compressive layer etch mask design; and

storing said tensile and compressive etch mask designs on a computer readable device.

12. The computer system of claim 11, further comprising: identifying sub-regions of said active regions, said sub-regions not containing FETs; and

placing additional fill shapes in said tensile and compressive layer etch mask designs, said additional fill shapes placed only in regions of said tensile and compressive

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layer etch mask designs corresponding to said sub-regions such that when PFETs are the predominate type of FET in said active regions a tensile layer will result on said integrated circuit chip fabricated from said tensile and compressive layer etch mask designs and when NFETs are the predominate FETs of said sub-regions a tensile layer will result on said integrated circuit chip fabricated from said tensile and compressive layer etch mask designs.

13. The computer system of claim 11, further comprising: placing first additional fill shapes in said tensile layer etch mask design, said additional fill shapes placed only in regions of said tensile layer etch mask design where NFETs predominate; and

placing second additional fill shapes in said compressive layer etch mask design, said additional fill shapes placed only in regions of said compressive layer etch mask design where PFETs predominate.

14. The computer system of claim 11, wherein greater than 70% of the area of each active region of said integrated circuit design contains FETs.

15. The computer system of claim 11, wherein said fill shapes are placed in said tensile layer etch mask design corresponding to said low FET density regions only when greater than 70% of the area of said corresponding active regions of said integrated circuit design contains NFETs.

16. The computer system of claim 11, wherein said fill shapes are placed in said compressive layer etch mask design corresponding to said low FET density regions only when greater than 70% of the area of said corresponding active regions of said integrated circuit design contains PFETs.

17. The computer system of claim 11, wherein said tensile layer etch mask design and said compressive layer etch mask design are stored in a netlist.

18. The computer system of claim 11, wherein said tensile layer etch mask design and said compressive layer etch mask design are stored in a shapes file.

19. The computer system of claim 11, wherein said computer readable storage device is selected from the group consisting of magnetic tape, a removable computer diskette, a random access memory device, a read only memory device, a rigid magnetic disk and an optical disk.

20. The computer system of claim 11, wherein said fill shapes comprise material from the compressive stressed dielectric layer added to the areas of said tensile stressed dielectric layer that are removed from said integrated circuit chip fabricated using said tensile layer etch mask design and material from the tensile stressed dielectric layer added to the areas of said compressive stressed dielectric layer to be removed from said integrated circuit chip fabricated using said compressive layer etch mask design.

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